

“I was alone in a world gone mad.”

These are the words my grandfather wrote about the night in October 1942 when his father was shot dead by a Nazi guard and the Jews in his small Polish town, including the rest of his family, were deported to the horrific Belzec death camp. He was a teenager alone in a Labor Camp, with the future bleak, terrifying, and filled with unimaginable suffering.

I have thought about my grandfather's words often in the 32 days since October 7th, as I have watched what I can only describe as a world gone mad.

Today, I come before you not as a partisan representative but as an American college student, making a genuine and desperate plea for members of our government to put aside all political agendas and take immediate and definitive action to protect Jewish Americans who today, in the year 2023, are being threatened with intimidation, violence, rape, and death because of our Jewish identity.

I don't want to be here. I should be in class learning how to employ excel shortcuts or tie out financial statements, or contemplating what courses to take next semester. But following the events of October 7th and the subsequent brutality against Jewish people in Israel, around the world, and even on American college campuses such as my own, there is nowhere else more critical for me to be today.

[[We are not only grappling with the ongoing tragedy in Israel and mourning the dead but also simultaneously facing the seemingly impossible fight on American soil to defend our rights to grieve and to even exist.]]

I have seen and heard things on Cornell's campus that just a month ago I could not have imagined. A professor publicly justified and celebrated barbaric acts of terror, including mutilation and rape of innocent women and children, as “exhilarating” and “energizing”, sparking students to freely call those acts “resistance” instead of blatant terror. His praise of undeniable terrorism only fueled animosity on campus and incited violence against the Jewish community.

Every day I am confronted with chants to free Palestine “from the river to the sea.” This catchy chant is not about peace or sovereignty for the Palestinian people — it is a call for a Palestinian state extending from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, a territory that encompasses the entire State of Israel. It is a Jew-hating, genocidal mandate seeking to deny the Jewish right to self-determination in Israel, and to exterminate all Jews, which Hamas has been consistently unequivocal about as their goal.

I respect the right of all people to advocate for their own freedoms. But that chant is not about Palestinian life — it is about Jewish death.

Every day I witness students tearing down and writing over posters depicting faces of innocent captives of Hamas, even infants for that matter, and replacing our prayers for the safe return of those hostages

with anti-Israel rhetoric and charges of genocide, not the terrorists whose charter calls for Jewish genocide. I see classmates perpetuate age-old antisemitic tropes on their social media accounts including that Jews control the media. My campus has been defaced with graffiti with phrases such as “F\*\*\* Israel” and “Zionism = genocide”-- that is, that the right of the Jewish people to self-determination is tantamount to mass murder.

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Imagine that you frequently attend Jewish community events and Shabbat dinners on campus. Then imagine scrolling on your phone to discover that a fellow student wants to “shoot up” 104West, the kosher dining hall, and instructs others to “gang rape all Jew pig women” on campus. That is what my peers and I experienced last week when reading the threats made by a fellow student on Greek Rank, an online forum for college students, instructing Cornell students to assault Jews, “stab and slit their throats” and “rape and throw them off cliffs.” This was not just hate speech — it was a call to action and imminent threat to harm Jewish students. Even after his arrest, we are afraid. The Cornell student who was found to have made these statements may have had a long-standing hatred for Jews, or he may have been someone who was facing issues with mental health and seized on the opportunity to join a growing “cause” against the Jews sparked by the prevalent rhetoric at Cornell. Professors and student organizations are planting seeds of hatred and spreading them across campus with disregard, or even with deliberate intent to incite.

And still, following the arrest and subsequent arraignment of that student, professors continue to teach blatant anti-Israel lessons in their classrooms. As directly reported by students in the course Race, Racism, and Public Policy, Professor Lindsey showed her class a video depicting that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid, in what students felt was an attempt to stir support for Hamas and anger at Israel. Students in the writing seminar, True Stories, taught by Professor Glaubman, also reported that the Professor asked each student to share his / her perspective on the conflict. After students expressed overwhelming sympathy for Israelis, she rebuffed their opinions, suggesting that “Palestine is a text book case of genocide right now”. After professing this sentiment, she probed the students to share their feelings again. These students felt pressured to shift their original views to please their professor and avoid risk to their grades. These not-so-subtle attempts at indoctrination have a tangible impact on the pervasive anti-Semitism spreading through our campus.

[[While after October 7th such anti-Jewish incidents have become more rampant, they did not start here. Both my brother and sister attended Cornell. During my brother's first semester at Cornell five years ago, he observed Swastikas drawn outside his residence hall, and the following semester, he encountered a poster that read "Free Palestine, F\*\*\* Zionism." As one of his friends left class, she was told, "see ya later, dirty Jew." All of these incidents were reported, but went unaddressed by the school. This anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiment is deeply entrenched and requires concerted efforts from students, faculty, administration, and lawmakers to rectify.]]

My grandmother, along with many other of my family members and close friends, live in Israel. Why are they calling and texting ME every day to check in and see how I am doing – do I feel safe on campus? Is there enough security? Do other students know I am Jewish? They live in an active war zone with rockets descending on them, and yet my safety on an American college campus is top of mind.

I grew up hearing first-hand accounts of the horrors that my grandfather endured during the Holocaust. I could never fully comprehend how his neighbors and friends turned against him and his family. How they allowed his family members to be murdered in front of their eyes, and Jews to be rounded up and tortured in concentration camps. Until now. I think of my great grandparents, great aunts and uncles who were brutally murdered for one reason only: because they were Jewish. Seeing and hearing such unbridled and unapologetic anti-Semitism unfold on my American college campus is terrifying. It is testament to the impacts of permitting Jew hatred to fester and infect the mob mentality of impressionable students.

We have watched elite college campuses devolve into echo chambers fostering animosity, aggression and bigotry, a shift that is painfully reminiscent of the vitriol and terror my grandfather endured in the 1930s. We can no longer allow antisemitism to be hidden under the guise of Anti Zionism. Disseminating lies and misinformation about Israel perpetuates this hate, validates violence, and condones the vilification and extermination of Jews. The proof is in the Jew hatred that consistently and openly accompanies attacks on Zionism.

I appreciate the words of support from some in the Cornell administration; however, words are not enough. We need security cameras and security guards, and strong enforcement of rules prohibiting the intimidation and threatening of violence towards fellow students. Professors and students who threaten and intimidate other students, regardless of their background, race or religion, need to be fired and expelled. On campuses such as Columbia, Harvard, Tulane, NYU, Cooper Union, Cornell and so many more, students need you to take action to ensure our safety. In a country with freedom at the very core of its being, founded upon the principles of freedom of religion, Jewish students should not be afraid. We elected you and entrusted you with our lives and safety. I implore you— please take action.